



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, August 15, 2002

Zoo Penguin Tests Positive for West Nile Virus

A dead penguin at the Seneca Park Zoo has tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV), according to Monroe County health officials and the Zoo's resident veterinarian. There are more than twenty five penguins in the zoo's penguin collection which, as a whole, appears clinically free of WNV.

Since January, 2002, 256 birds have been reported statewide with WNV while 19 of those birds were found dead in Monroe County. Nationally, over 111 different bird species have been reported to the West Nile Virus mortality database.

West Nile Virus is a viral infection transmitted by mosquitoes. The virus is not contagious between birds or from birds to people.

The mosquito is not selective in the birds it seeks out. From the small American Goldfinch and American Tree Sparrow to the larger birds such as the Canada Goose, American Bald Eagle or imported Penguin, WNV results in equal devastation to birds contracting WNV.

"These reported bird deaths serve as an important reminder for residents across the county to be cautious over the next couple of weeks," said County Health Director Dr. Andrew Doniger. "The next five weeks are typically the riskiest period for human exposure and therefore a time when we ask the public, particularly our older residents, to take steps to reduce mosquito bites," said Health Director Dr. Andrew Doniger.

WNV protective recommendations:

- Minimize outdoor activity between dusk and dawn
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to cover exposed skin
- Use insect repellent containing DEET; be certain to follow manufacturer's instructions and wash off once inside for the evening
- Drain standing water on property to reduce breeding areas

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According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), very few mosquitoes – less than 1% - carry WNV. If bitten by an infected mosquito, less than 1% of people become seriously ill; most people will have mild flu-like symptoms or exhibit no symptoms at all.

People over the age of 50 and those with chronic illness are at highest-risk for WNV. Although there is no vaccine or specific treatment, if a person develops severe symptoms, such as high fever and headache, they should consult a doctor.

Residents may call **234-9600** for WNV information or to report a dead bird.

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